

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI  
EASTERN DIVISION**

JOSEPH MICHAEL DEVON ENGEL, )  
Plaintiff, )  
v. )  
ERDCC, et al., )  
Defendants. )  
No. 4:20 CV 1825 MTS

## **MEMORANDUM AND ORDER**

This matter is before the Court upon review of a civil complaint filed by Joseph Michael Devon Engel (registration no. 1069055), an inmate at Missouri Eastern Correctional Center (“MECC”). For the reasons explained below, Plaintiff will be given leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*, and this action will be dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1)

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1), a prisoner bringing a civil action *in forma pauperis* is required to pay the full amount of the filing fee. If the prisoner has insufficient funds in his or her prison account to pay the entire fee, the Court must assess and, when funds exist, collect an initial partial filing fee of 20 percent of the greater of (1) the average monthly deposits in the prisoner's account, or (2) the average monthly balance in the prisoner's account for the prior six-month period. After payment of the initial partial filing fee, the prisoner is required to make monthly payments of 20 percent of the preceding month's income credited to the prisoner's account. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). The agency having custody of the prisoner will forward these monthly payments to the Clerk of Court each time the amount in the prisoner's account exceeds \$10, until the filing fee is fully paid. *Id.*

Although Plaintiff did not file a separate motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*, Plaintiff states in the body of his complaint that he seeks “[a]pplication to proceed in District Court without prepaying fees or costs” because he only “get[s] \$5.00 Dollars a month.” Doc. [1 at 1]. Liberally construed, Plaintiff can be understood to ask the Court to grant him leave to commence this action without prepayment of the required filing fee.

Plaintiff did not file a certified inmate account statement, however, the Court notes Plaintiff filed a statement for the relevant period in another case he had pending in the Eastern District of Missouri: *see* docket entry at Doc. [11] filed on January 8, 2021, in *Engel v. Corizon, et al.*, 4:20-CV-1695 NAB (E.D. Mo.). As such, the Court will reference that account statement to calculate Plaintiff’s initial partial filing fee here.

A review of Plaintiff’s account statement in the *Engel v. Corizon, et al.* case indicates an average monthly deposit of \$28.11 and an average monthly balance of \$0.04. The Court therefore finds Plaintiff has insufficient funds to pay the entire filing fee. Accordingly, the Court will assess an initial partial filing fee of \$5.62, which is 20 percent of Plaintiff’s average monthly deposit.

#### **28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)**

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), the Court may dismiss a complaint filed *in forma pauperis* if, *inter alia*, it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. An action is frivolous if “it lacks an arguable basis in either law or in fact.” *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 328 (1989). Dismissals on this ground should only be ordered when legal theories are “indisputably meritless,” or when the claims rely on “clearly baseless” factual allegations. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 31 (1992). “Clearly baseless” factual allegations include those that are “fanciful,” “fantastic,” and “delusional.” *Id.* at 32-33 (quoting *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 325, 327). “As those words suggest, a finding of factual frivolousness is appropriate when

the facts alleged rise to the level of the irrational or the wholly incredible, whether or not there are judicially noticeable facts available to contradict them.” *Id.* at 33.

An action is malicious when it is undertaken for the purpose of harassing the named defendants rather than vindicating a cognizable right. *Spencer v. Rhodes*, 656 F. Supp. 458, 461-63 (E.D.N.C. 1987), *aff’d* 826 F.2d 1061 (4th Cir. 1987). An action can also be considered malicious if it is part of a longstanding pattern of abusive and repetitious lawsuits. *In re Tyler*, 839 F.2d 1290, 1293 (8th Cir. 1988) (per curiam). See *Cochran v. Morris*, 73 F.3d 1310, 1316 (4th Cir. 1996) (when determining whether an action is malicious, the Court need not consider only the complaint before it, but may consider the plaintiff’s other litigious conduct).

To determine whether an action fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, the Court must engage in a two-step inquiry. First, the Court must identify the allegations in the complaint that are not entitled to the assumption of truth. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1950-51 (2009). These include “legal conclusions” and “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action [that are] supported by mere conclusory statements.” *Id.* at 1949. Second, the Court must determine whether the complaint states a plausible claim for relief. *Id.* at 1950-51. This is a “context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense.” *Id.* at 1950. The plaintiff is required to plead facts that show more than the “mere possibility of misconduct.” *Id.* The Court must review the factual allegations in the complaint “to determine if they plausibly suggest an entitlement to relief.” *Id.* at 1951. When faced with alternative explanations for the alleged misconduct, the Court may exercise its judgment in determining whether Plaintiff’s proffered conclusion is the most plausible, or whether it is more likely that no misconduct occurred. *Id.* at 1950, 1951-52.

### The Complaint

Plaintiff, who identifies himself as a sovereign citizen, is a self-represented litigant currently incarcerated at MECC in Pacific, Missouri. At the time this case was filed, however, Plaintiff was an inmate at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center (“ERDCC”) in Bonne Terre, Missouri. The instant complaint is one of more than one hundred and thirty (130) civil rights actions that Plaintiff has recently filed in this Court pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

Plaintiff’s complaint is handwritten on two pages of notebook paper. He brings this action against thirty-one defendants, most of whom are identified by a job title only: ERDCC; Assist Att. General; CO1; CO2; Sergeant; Lieutenant; Corporal; Captain; Major; CCA; FUM; Caseworker; Caseworker; Assist Superintendent; Superintendent; Assist Warden; Warden; IPO Supervisor ERDCC; IPO ERDCC; P&P; P&P Director; P&P Assist Director; MODOC; Director; Assist Director; Lt. Governor; Governor; Senator MO; Senator MO; House Rep MO; and Att. General. He sues defendants in their official and individual capacities.

Plaintiff alleges his claims in their entirety as follows:

I’m su[]ing each Dept. for the amount shown because per policie [sic] in Hole or not we are allowed pants, shirts, boxers, soxes [sic]. Well in ERDCC boxers, soxes [sic], shirts, not right in human. [sic] Discusting. [sic] Degrading. CO come to your door wakes you up your penis hanging out get in trouble not to. [sic]

Doc. [1 at 2]. Plaintiff provides no additional facts.

For relief, Plaintiff lists all thirty-one defendants and requests a separate, arbitrary amount from each individual or entity spanning from “1 Trillion” to “7,000 Trillion” dollars. *Id.* at 2. For example, Plaintiff seeks “2,000 Trillion” from the Governor, “180 Trillion” from two unnamed caseworkers, “500 Trillion” from the Warden, and “1,200 Trillion” from the ERDCC. *Id.* Plaintiff also seeks “10,000 stocks” in various metals and corporations, such as gold, silver, lead, Sprint,

Dell and Windows, as well as an additional “10,000 stocks” in several countries and currencies.

*Id.*

## **Discussion**

Having carefully reviewed the complaint, the Court concludes that Plaintiff’s claims against defendants must be dismissed. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 191(e)(2)(B).

### **A. Claims Against the ERDCC, the Missouri Department of Corrections, and Probation and Parole**

The Missouri Department of Corrections (“MDOC”) is a department of the State of Missouri, Probation and Parole is a division of the MDOC, and the ERDCC is a state correctional facility. Thus, the claims against these defendants are treated the same as claims against the State of Missouri itself. These claims fail for two reasons. First, the State of Missouri is not a “person” for purposes of 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Second, the State of Missouri is protected by the doctrine of sovereign immunity.

#### **i. State is Not a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 “Person”**

“Section 1983 provides for an action against a ‘person’ for a violation, under color of law, of another’s civil rights.” *McLean v. Gordon*, 548 F.3d 613, 618 (8th Cir. 2008); *see also Deretich v. Office of Admin. Hearings*, 798 F.2d 1147, 1154 (8th Cir. 1986) (stating that “[§] 1983 provides a cause of action against persons only”). However, “neither a State nor its officials acting in their official capacity are ‘persons’ under § 1983.” *Will v. Michigan Dep’t of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989); *see also Calzone v. Hawley*, 866 F.3d 866, 872 (8th Cir. 2017) (asserting that a “State is not a person under § 1983”); and *Kruger v. Nebraska*, 820 F.3d 295, 301 (8th Cir. 2016) (explaining that “a state is not a person for purposes of a claim for money damages under § 1983”). Here, as noted above, Plaintiff has sued both the Missouri Department of Corrections and the ERDCC. These claims are treated as being made against the State of Missouri. However, a state is

not a “person” for purposes of a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claim for money damages, which is what Plaintiff is seeking. Because Plaintiff is missing an essential element of a § 1983 action, his claims against the MDOC, the ERDCC, and Probation and Parole must be dismissed.

## **ii. Sovereign Immunity**

“Sovereign immunity is the privilege of the sovereign not to be sued without its consent.” *Va. Office for Prot. & Advocacy v. Stewart*, 563 U.S. 247, 253 (2011). The Eleventh Amendment has been held to confer immunity on an un-consenting state from lawsuits brought in federal court by a state’s own citizens or the citizens of another state. *Edelman v. Jordan*, 415 U.S. 651, 662-63 (1974); *see also Webb v. City of Maplewood*, 889 F.3d 483, 485 (8th Cir. 2018) (“The Eleventh Amendment protects States and their arms and instrumentalities from suit in federal court”); *Dover Elevator Co. v. Ark. State Univ.*, 64 F.3d 442, 446 (8th Cir. 1995) (“The Eleventh Amendment bars private parties from suing a state in federal court”); and *Egerdahl v. Hibbing Cnty. Coll.*, 72 F.3d 615, 618-19 (8th Cir. 1995) (“Generally, in the absence of consent a suit in which the State or one of its agencies or departments is named as the defendant is proscribed by the Eleventh Amendment”). The Eleventh Amendment bars suit against a state or its agencies for any kind of relief, not merely monetary damages. *Monroe v. Arkansas State Univ.*, 495 F.3d 591, 594 (8th Cir. 2007) (stating that district court erred in allowing the plaintiff to proceed against state university for injunctive relief, and remanding matter to district court for dismissal).

There are two “well-established exceptions” to the sovereign immunity provided by the Eleventh Amendment. *Barnes v. State of Missouri*, 960 F.2d 62, 64 (8th Cir. 1992). “The first exception to Eleventh Amendment immunity is where Congress has statutorily abrogated such immunity by clear and unmistakable language.” *Id.* The second exception is when a state waives its immunity to suit in federal court. *Id.* at 65. A state will be found to have waived its immunity

“only where stated by the most express language or by such overwhelming implications from the text as will leave no room for any other reasonable construction.” *Welch v. Tex. Dep’t of Highways & Pub. Transp.*, 483 U.S. 468, 473 (1987). Neither exception is applicable in this case.

The first exception is inapplicable because the Supreme Court has determined that § 1983 does not revoke a state’s Eleventh Amendment immunity from suit in federal court. *See Will*, 491 U.S. at 66 (“We cannot conclude that § 1983 was intended to disregard the well-established immunity of a State from being sued without its consent”); and *Quern v. Jordan*, 440 U.S. 332, 341 (1979) (“[W]e simply are unwilling to believe. . . that Congress intended by the general language of § 1983 to override the traditional sovereign immunity of the States”). The second exception is also inapplicable because the State of Missouri has not waived its sovereign immunity in this type of case. *See Mo. Rev. Stat. 537.600* (explaining that sovereign immunity is in effect and providing exceptions).

In this case, Plaintiff has named the MDOC, the ERDCC, and Probation and Parole as defendants. As noted above, however, the Eleventh Amendment bars suit against a state or its agencies for both monetary and injunctive relief. Furthermore, no exceptions to sovereign immunity are present in this case. Therefore, Plaintiff’s claims against these three defendants must be dismissed.

**B. Claims Against the Assist Att. General, CO1, CO2, Sergeant, Lieutenant, Corporal, Captain, Major, CCA, FUM, Caseworker, Caseworker, Assist Superintendent, Superintendent, Assist Warden, Warden, IPO Supervisor ERDCC, IPO ERDCC, P&P Director, P&P Assist Director, Director, Assist Director, Lt. Governor, Governor, Senator MO, Senator MO, House Rep MO, and Att. General**

**i. Official Capacity Claims**

In an official capacity claim against an individual, the claim is actually “against the governmental entity itself.” *See White v. Jackson*, 865 F.3d 1064, 1075 (8th Cir. 2017). Thus, a

“suit against a public employee in his or her official capacity is merely a suit against the public employer.” *Johnson v. Outboard Marine Corp.*, 172 F.3d 531, 535 (8th Cir. 1999); *see also Brewington v. Keener*, 902 F.3d 796, 800 (8th Cir. 2018) (explaining that official capacity suit against a sheriff and his deputy “must be treated as a suit against the County”); *Kelly v. City of Omaha, Neb.*, 813 F.3d 1070, 1075 (8th Cir. 2016) (stating that a “plaintiff who sues public employees in their official, rather than individual, capacities sues only the public employer”); and *Elder-Keep v. Aksamit*, 460 F.3d 979, 986 (8th Cir. 2006) (stating that a “suit against a public official in his official capacity is actually a suit against the entity for which the official is an agent”).

In this case, the individual defendants, identified only by their job titles, all appear to be employees of the State of Missouri. As such, the official capacity claims against them are actually claims against the state itself, which is defendants’ employer. However, as noted above, plaintiff cannot bring a claim for damages against the State of Missouri under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 because the state is not a “person.” *See Will*, 491 U.S. at 71 (asserting that “neither a State nor its officials acting in their official capacity are ‘persons’ under § 1983”). Furthermore, “[a] claim for damages against a state employee in his official capacity is barred under the Eleventh Amendment.” *See Andrus ex rel. Andrus v. Arkansas*, 197 F.3d 953, 955 (8th Cir. 1999). For these reasons, Plaintiff’s official capacity claims must be dismissed.

## **ii. Individual Capacity Claims**

Liability in a § 1983 case is personal. *Frederick v. Motsinger*, 873 F.3d 641, 646 (8th Cir. 2017). In other words, “[g]overnment officials are personally liable only for their own misconduct.” *S.M. v. Krigbaum*, 808 F.3d 335, 340 (8th Cir. 2015). As such, § 1983 liability “requires a causal link to, and direct responsibility for, the deprivation of rights.” *See Mayorga v. Missouri*, 442 F.3d 1128, 1132 (8th Cir. 2006) (quoting *Madewell v. Roberts*, 909 F.2d 1203, 1208 (8th Cir. 1990)); *see also Kohl v. Casson*, 5 F.3d 1141, 1149 (8th Cir. 1993) (dismissing the

plaintiff's excessive bail claims because none of the defendants set the plaintiff's bail, and therefore, "there can be no causal connection between any action on the part of the defendants and any alleged deprivation" of Plaintiff's rights). To that end, a plaintiff must allege facts connecting the defendant to the challenged action. *See Bitzan v. Bartruff*, 916 F.3d 716, 717 (8th Cir. 2019).

Here, Plaintiff has failed to establish that any of the thirty-one unnamed individuals he has listed as defendants did anything to violate his constitutional rights. Indeed, the only information he has provided regarding each defendant is the specific amount of money he wants from them. Simply listing a person as a defendant is not enough to assert their responsibility. *See Allen v. Purkett*, 5 F.3d 1151, 1153 (8th Cir. 1993) (agreeing with district court dismissal of two defendants who were named as defendants in the complaint, but who had no factual allegations made against them). Rather, as noted above, Plaintiff must show each defendant's personal responsibility by demonstrating a causal connection between their actions and the deprivation of one of Plaintiff's constitutional rights. He has failed to do this. Plaintiff does not identify any particular person or persons whose conduct rose to the level of a constitutional violation. For these reasons, Plaintiff's individual capacity claims must be dismissed.

### **C. Conditions of Confinement Claim**

Plaintiff's complaint is also subject to dismissal because he fails to state a claim under the Eighth Amendment. Conditions of confinement "must not involve the wanton and unnecessary infliction of pain, nor may they be grossly disproportionate to the severity of the crime warranting imprisonment." *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 347 (1981). *See also Nelson v. Corr. Med. Servs.*, 583 F.3d 522, 528 (8th Cir. 2009) (stating that "[t]he Eighth Amendment prohibits the infliction of cruel and unusual punishment on those convicted of crimes"). As such, pursuant to the Eighth Amendment, prisoners are entitled to the basic necessities of human life and to humane treatment. *Goff v. Menke*, 672 F.2d 702, 705 (8th Cir. 1982). To that end, prison officials are

required to “ensure that inmates receive adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care.” *Simmons v. Cook*, 154 F.3d 805, 807 (8th Cir. 1998).

In order to allege an Eighth Amendment violation, a prisoner must prove that the defendant’s conduct rose to the level of a constitutional violation “by depriving the plaintiff of the minimal civilized measure of life’s necessities.” *Revels v. Vincenz*, 382 F.3d 870, 875 (8th Cir. 2004). The constitutional question regarding prison conditions and confinement is whether the defendant “acted with deliberate indifference.” *Saylor v. Nebraska*, 812 F.3d 637, 644 (8th Cir. 2016). A prison official is deliberately indifferent if he or she “knows of and disregards . . . a substantial risk to an inmate’s health or safety.” *Id.* at 645.

Here, Plaintiff appears to allege he was provided with “dis[g]usting” and “degrading” boxers, socks, and shirts while he was incarcerated at ERDCC. This allegation is insufficient to show unconstitutional conditions of confinement. His complaint fails to present facts showing a substantial risk to his health or safety or that he was deprived of “the minimal civilized measure of life’s necessities.” With regard to the clothing he was provided, which Plaintiff identifies as boxers, socks, and shirts, Plaintiff has not alleged that they are not washed before being reused or are otherwise dangerous. Rather than supporting the proposition that his Eighth Amendment rights have been violated, Plaintiff relies on a conclusory pleading that the Court is not required to accept as true. *See Wiles v. Capitol Indem. Corp.*, 280 F.3d 868, 870 (8th Cir. 2002) (“While the court must accept allegations of fact as true . . . the court is free to ignore legal conclusions, unsupported conclusions, unwarranted inferences and sweeping legal conclusions cast in the form of factual allegations”). *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678; *Torti v. Hoag*, 868 F.3d 666, 671 (8th Cir. 2017) (“Courts are not bound to accept as true a legal conclusion couched as a factual allegation, and factual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level”). Even self-represented plaintiffs are required to allege facts in support of their claims, and the Court will not

assume facts that are not alleged. *See Stone v. Harry*, 364 F.3d 912, 914-15 (8th Cir. 2004). Therefore, Plaintiff's conditions of confinement claim must be dismissed.

#### **D. Malicious Prosecution**

Finally, it appears this action is also subject to dismissal because it is malicious. *See Spencer v. Rhodes*, 656 F. Supp. 458, 461-63 (E.D.N.C. 1987), *aff'd* 826 F.2d 1061 (4th Cir. 1987) (an action is malicious when it is undertaken for the purpose of harassing the defendants rather than vindicating a cognizable right). Since filing this action, Plaintiff has filed over one hundred and thirty (130) other complaints in this Court alleging that his civil rights have been violated by these defendants and other state and local entities and officials. Plaintiff submits the pleadings in bulk, and he specifies that he intends each set of pleadings to be docketed as an individual civil action. The nature of those pleadings and Plaintiff's claims for damages are roughly the same as those in the instant action. It therefore appears that this action is part of an attempt to harass these defendants and others by bringing repetitious lawsuits, not a legitimate attempt to vindicate a cognizable right. *See Spencer*, 656 F. Supp. at 461-63; *see also In re Billy Roy Tyler*, 839 F.2d 1290 (8th Cir. 1988) (noting that an action is malicious when it is a part of a longstanding pattern of abusive and repetitious lawsuits). This action is subject to dismissal for this reason, as well.

Plaintiff is cautioned to avoid the practice of repeatedly filing meritless lawsuits. First, a prisoner who has filed three or more actions or appeals that were dismissed for one of the reasons stated in 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) is subject to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g), which limits his future ability to proceed *in forma pauperis*. Second, the practice of repeatedly filing meritless lawsuits can be interpreted as an abuse of the judicial process, which can result in court-imposed limitations on the ability to bring future lawsuits. This Court is “vested with the discretion to impose sanctions upon a party under its inherent disciplinary power.” *Bass v. General Motors Corp.*, 150 F.3d 842, 851 (8th Cir. 1998) (citations omitted). This includes the discretion to craft and impose sanctions

to deter litigants from engaging in “conduct which abuses the judicial process.” *Chambers v. NASCO, Inc.*, 501 U.S. 32, 43-45 (1991). *See Tyler*, 839 F.2d at 1292 (affirming the district court’s *sua sponte* determination that a litigant should be limited to filing one lawsuit per month pursuant to certain conditions precedent as a sanction for the litigant’s repeated abuse of the judicial process). These powers stem from “the control necessarily vested in courts to manage their own affairs so as to achieve the orderly and expeditious disposition of cases.” *Id.* (quoting *Link v. Wabash R. Co.*, 370 U.S. 626, 630-31 (1962)).

Having considered Plaintiff’s abusive litigation practices and the manner in which he prepared the instant complaint and other civil complaints, the Court concludes that it would be futile to permit Plaintiff leave to file an amended complaint in this action. The Court will therefore dismiss this action at this time pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2).

#### **E. Motion to Appoint Counsel**

In the body of the complaint, Plaintiff appears to seek the appointment of counsel. Doc. [1 at 1]. The motion will be denied as moot as this action is being dismissed without prejudice. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

Accordingly,

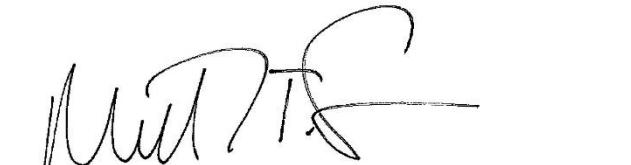
**IT IS HEREBY ORDERED** that Plaintiff’s motion to proceed *in forma pauperis*, Doc. [1] is **GRANTED**.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that the Plaintiff shall pay an initial filing fee of \$5.62 within thirty (30) days of the date of this Order. Plaintiff is instructed to make his remittance payable to “Clerk, United States District Court,” and to include upon it: (1) his name; (2) his prison registration number; (3) the case number; and (4) that the remittance is for an original proceeding.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that the Plaintiff’s request for appointment of counsel is **DENIED as moot**.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that this action is **DISMISSED** pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). A separate order of dismissal will be entered herewith.

Dated this 1<sup>st</sup> day of February, 2021.



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MATTHEW T. SCHELP  
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE